

**Prepared Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell**

**Vice Chairman - Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**

**Legislative Hearing on S.343**

**“The Indian Tribal Development Consolidated Funding Act of 2002”**

**May 8, 2002 — 10:00 a.m.**

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Good morning and welcome to the Committee on Indian Affairs hearing on S.343, the *Indian Tribal Development Consolidated Funding Act of 2001*, legislation I introduced in February, 2001, joined by our Chairman, Senator Inouye.

By now we are all-too-familiar with the unfortunate economic conditions in Indian communities:

- a jobless rate of 45%, and 80-90% in Plains Tribes' economies;
- the poorest health in the U.S.: tuberculosis, diabetes, cancer;
- substandard and crowded housing; and
- an education system that traps Indian youngsters in hopelessness.

So — as you know Mr. Chairman — despite some recent success with Indian gaming, natural resource development, and other business opportunities, most tribes remain mired in Third World Poverty.

History now shows us that there are a core group of conditions that any developing economy needs and these are what we have been focusing on at the Federal level:

1. a solid physical infrastructure;
2. a healthy and educated workforce; and
3. financial capital.

There is one ingredient we cannot provide and that is tribal leadership — and when I say “leadership” I don’t just mean someone who gets elected. I mean

1. someone willing to work to make his tribe attractive to both Indian entrepreneurs and outside investors; and
2. someone willing to do the unpopular, but necessary, things like reforming constitutions, insisting on independent judiciaries, and making sure contracts and agreements are honored by tribes even with changes in tribal administration.

In December, 2001, the General Accounting Office published a report showing that of the billions of dollars of Federal economic development programs for Indian tribes and Indians much of it goes unused.

In the 1980s, the Congress launched what became the highly-successful “Indian Self Governance” program and grew out of intense Congressional dissatisfaction with the performance of the Indian agencies, the BIA and the IHS.

Because of what it saw as agency ineptness, Congress decided that agency reforms were not going to take place and the only answer was to circumvent the agencies by providing the funds directly to the tribes themselves.

After decades and billions spent on Indian development, I dare anyone to come before this Committee and state with a straight face that “It is working”.

It is NOT working Mr. Chairman and you and I both know that.

There is enough blame and finger pointing to go around but I believe that the time has come for change and that’s why I introduced S.343.

Frankly, I think we in Congress and Tribal Leadership have to think of launching innovative — some would say radical — changes in the way Federal economic development assistance to Indian tribes is handled.

Again this session I introduced legislation modeled after Self Governance that, in essence, provides economic development funds directly to the tribes.

The *Indian Tribal Development Consolidated Funding Act of 2002* authorizes a Pilot Project for up to 24 Indian tribes to participate in projects to foster community, economic, and business development in Native American communities.

In addition to “Block Granting” Economic Development Funds to tribes, this bill creates a clearinghouse of Federal Indian program information will ensure that tribes take advantage of all Federal agency programs with little to no costs to the government.

Mr. Chairman, it is my intention to work with the Administration to produce agreement on this bill — or something that looks very much like it — in this session of Congress.

If we cannot reach agreement this session, then be assured this bill will be among the first (if not the first) that I introduce again next year.

I have a number of items that I’d like to put in the Record Mr. Chairman including President Nixon’s “Special Message to Congress on Indian Affairs” from 1970; two articles from The Economist; a copy of the GAO Report I cited; and an article from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

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